DING DONG BELL

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DISCARD

DING DONG BELL

Books by

WALTER DE LA MARE

MEMOIRS OF A MIDGET

THE RETURN

THE RIDDLE AND OTHER TALES

THE THREE MULLA MULGARS

CROSSINGS: A FAIRY PLAY

COME HITHER: AN ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS

HENRY BROCKEN

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DING DONG BELL

BY WALTER DE LA MARE

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To
H. B. *and* H. D.

'He that lay in a golden urn eminently above the earth, was not like to find the quiet of his bones. . . .

'Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? . . .'

Sir Thomas Browne

How should I your true love know from another one?
By his Cockle hat and staffe, and his Sandal shoone.
He is dead and gone, Lady, he is dead and gone,
At his head a grasse-greene Turfe, at his heeles a stone.

William Shakespeare

' . . . Why dost thou lament my death, or call me miserable that am much more happy

than thyself? what misfortune is befallen me? Is it because I am not so bald, crooked, old, rotten, as thou art? What have I lost? some of your good cheer, gay clothes, music, singing, dancing, kissing, merry-meetings, *thalami lubentias, &c.,* is that it? Is it not much better not to hunger at all than to eat; not to thirst than to drink to satisfy thirst; not to be cold than to put on clothes to drive away cold? You had more need rejoice that I am freed from diseases, agues, cares, anxieties, livor, love, covetousness, hatred, envy, malice, that I fear no more thieves, tyrants, enemies, as you do. . . .'

Robert Burton

'The long habit of living indisposeth us for dying. . . . But many are too early old, and before the date of age. Adversity stretcheth our days, misery makes Alcmena's nights, and time hath no wings unto it. . . .'

Sir Thomas Browne

''Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a gar-

den; the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption, for fear they shall never get out.'

John Webster

'. . . Thy soul is eclipsed for a time, I yield, as the sun is shadowed by a cloud; no doubt but those gracious beams of God's mercy will shine upon thee again, as they have formerly done: those embers of faith, hope and repentance, now buried in ashes, will flame out afresh, and be fully revived. . . . We must live by faith, not by feeling; 'tis the beginning of grace to wish for grace: we must expect and tarry. . . .'

Robert Burton

'Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us. . . .'

Sir Thomas Browne

'And surely then, O Socrates (said the guest

from Mantinea), man's life is worth the living, when he beholds that Primal Fair?'

'Crist sparid not to visyte pore men . . . in the colde greve,'

John Wyclif

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LICHEN

LICHEN

Ther cam a privee theef, men clepeth Deeth,
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
And with his spere he smoot his herte a-two,
And wente his wey with-outen wordes mo . . .

EXCEPT for one domed and mountainous cloud of snow and amber, the sky was blue as a child's eyes, blue as the tiny chasing butterflies which looped the air above our shimmering platform —bluer far, in fact, than my new silk sunshade. I just sat and basted my travel-wearied bones in the sunshine; and thanked heaven for so delicious a place to be alive in.

It was, I agree, like catching sight of it in hungry glimpses through a rather dingy window. There had been repeated interruptions. First had come a luggage train. It shunted this way, it shunted that. Its buffers crashed;

its brakes squealed; its sheep baa-ed, and its miserable, dribbling cattle, with their gleaming horns, stared blindly out at us under their long eyelashes in a stagnant dumb despair.

When that had gone groaning on its way, a 'local'—a kind of nursery train—puff-puffed in on the other side. And then we enjoyed a Strauss-like interlude of milk-cans and a vociferous Sunday school excursion—the scholars (merely tiny tots, many of them) engaged even on this week-day in chaunting at intervals the profoundest question Man can address to the University: 'Are we downhearted? No?'

These, having wandered off into a dark-mouthed tunnel, the noonday express with a wildly soaring crescendo of lamentation came sweeping in sheer magnificence of onset round its curve, roared through the little green empty station—its windows a long broken faceless glint of sunlit glass—and that too vanished. Vanished!

A swirl of dust and an unutterable stillness

followed after it. The skin of a banana on the platform was the only proof that it had come and gone. Its shattering clamour had left for contrast an almost helpless sense of peace. 'Yes, yes!' we all seemed to be whispering—from the Cedar of Lebanon to the little hyssop in the wall—'here we all are; and still, thank heaven, safe. *Safe.*'

The snapdragons and sweet-williams burned on in their narrow flint-bordered bed. The hollow of beautiful verdure but a stone's throw beyond the further green bank, with its square bell-tower and its old burial stones, softly rang again with faint trillings. I turned instinctively to the old gentleman who was sharing the hard, 'grained,' sunny bench with me, in sure and certain hope of his saying Amen to my relief. It was a rather heedless impulsiveness, perhaps; but I could not help myself —I just turned.

But no. He tapped the handle of his umbrella with gloved fingers. 'As you will,

ma'am,' he said pettishly. 'But *my* hopes are in the past.'

'I was merely thinking,' I began, 'the contrast, you know; and now—how peaceful it all is.'

He interrupted me with a stiff little bow. 'Precisely. But the thought was sentimental, ma'am. You would deafen us all to make us hear. You tolerate what you should attack—the follies, vexations, the evils which that pestilent monster represents; haste, restlessness, an impious money-grubbing. I hate the noise; I hate the trespass; the stench; the futility. Fifty years ago there wasn't a sound for leagues about us but the wind and the birds. Few came; none went. It was an earthly Paradise. And over there, as you see, lay its entry elsewhither. Fifty years ago you could have cradled an infant on that old tombstone yonder —Zadakiel Puncheon's—and it would have slept the sun down. Now, poor creature, his

ashes are jarred and desecrated a dozen times a day—by mechanisms like *that!*'

He flicked a gaudy bandana handkerchief in the direction the departing dragon had taken —a dragon long since out of sight.

'But how enchanting a name!' I murmured placatingly. 'Zadakiel Puncheon! It might have come out of Dickens, don't you think—a godfather of Martin Chuzzlewit's? Or, better still, Nathaniel Hawthorne.'

He eyed me suspiciously over his steel spectacles. 'Well, Dickens, maybe. But Hawthorne: I admit him reluctantly; a writer, with such a text to his hand that—— And how many, pray, of his fellow-countrymen ever read him; and how many of *them* pay heed to him?'

'But surely,' I interposed hastily, 'think of St. Francis, of Madame Guyon, of—of all the mystics! Or even of the cities where, you know, Lot . . . just the five righteous. . . .

Besides, even though Hawthorne didn't preach —well, *hard* enough; even if *no* one reads him, we can't blame Dickens—we've no right to do that. *Surely!*' I had grown quite eloquent —and scarlet.

He waved me blandly aside. 'I blame nobody, my dear young lady. Mine are merely old-fashioned opinions; and I have no wish to enforce them. Nor even to share them. My *views,* I mean,' he whisked me a generous little bow; 'not these few sunny minutes. They indeed are a rare privilege. No, I loved old things when I was a child; I love them now. I despise nothing simply because the Almighty has concealed its uses. I see no virtue in mere size, or in mere rapidity of motion. Nor can I detect any particular preciousness in time "saved," as you call it, merely to be wasted.'

The gay handkerchief flicked these sentiments to the heavens as if in contemptuous challenge of the complete Railway Companies of the Solar System, and dismayed with the

burden of my responsibility, I gazed out once more into the bird-enchanted, shadowy green-land—whispering its decoy to us immediately on the other side of its low stone wall.

A brief silence fell. There seemed suddenly to be nothing left to talk about. The old gentleman peered sidelong at me an instant, then thrust out a cramped-up hand, and lightly touched my sleeve.

'I see you don't much affect my old-fashioned tune, ma'am. But such things will not pester you for long. Most of my school have years since set out on the long vacation. Soon they'll be packing me off too; and not a soul left to write my epitaph. . . .

Here lies old bones:
Sam Gilpin once.

'How'll that do, heh?' He rocked gently on his gingham. '"Sam Gilpin once. . . ." But that's gone too,' he added, as if he were over-familiar with the thought.

'But I *do* understand, perfectly,' I managed to blurt out at last. 'And I agree. And it's hateful. But we can't help ourselves! You see we *must* go on. It's the—the momentum; the sheer impetus.'

He openly smiled on me. 'Well, well, well!' he said. '"*Must* go on," eh? And soon, too, must I. So we're both of a mind at last. And that being so, I wish I could admit you into my museum over yonder. It is my last resource. I spend a peaceful hour in it whenever I can. Hardly a day passes just now but I make my pilgrimage there—between (to be precise, my dear young lady)—between the 7.23 *up* and the 8.44 *down*.'

'And there are epitaphs?' I cried gaily, with that peculiar little bell-peal in the voice, I'm afraid, which one simply cannot avoid when trying to placate infants, the ailing, and the aged.

'Ay, epitaphs,' he repeated. 'But very few of *this* headlong century. The art is lost; the spirit's changed. Once the living and the dead

were in a good honest humour with one another. You could chisel the truth in, even over a lifelong crony's clay. You could still share a jest together; one on this side of the grave, one on that. But now the custom's gone with the mind. We are too mortal solemn or too mortal hasty and shallow.

'Why, over there, mark ye,' he pointed the great fat-ferruled stump of his umbrella towards the half-buried tombstones once more. 'Over *there,* such things are as common as buttercups. And I know most of 'em by heart. My father, ma'am, was the last human creature laid to rest in that graveyard. He was a scholar of a still older school than I—and that's next quietest to being in one's grave. I remember his tree there when it sighed no louder than a meadow brook. Shut your eyes now of a windy evening, and it might be the Atlantic. There they lie. And I'll crawl in somewhere yet, like the cat in the adage—out of this noisy polluted world!' A little angry

cloud began to settle on his old face once more.

'And there's two things else make it an uncommon pleasant place to rest in—a little brawling stream, that courses along upon its southern boundary, and the bees and butterflies and birds. There's rare plantage there, and it attracts rare visitors—though not, I am grateful to say, the human biped. No.'

Yet again a swallow swooped in from the noonday blue in a flight as lovely as a resting moonbeam. Somewhere behind the peculiar fretwork with which all railway directors embellish their hostels it deposited its tiny bundle of flies in squawking mouths out of sight though not out of hearing, and, with a flicker of pinion, was out, off, away again, into the air.

My old gentleman had not noticed it. He was still gently fuming over the murdered past: still wagging his head in dudgeon in his antique high hat.

'But I had no idea,' I ventured to insinuate

at last, 'there were ever many really original epi——'

'I am not expectant of "ideas" nowadays, ma'am,' he retaliated. 'We don't think: we plot. We don't live: we huddle. We deafen ourselves by shouting. "There is no *peace*, saith my God . . ." and I'll eat my hat, if He did not mean for the blindworms as well as "for the wicked."'

He stooped forward to look into my face. 'Smile you may, ma'am,' he went on a little petulantly, patting his emphasis once more on the ivory handle of his umbrella, 'you know there is *not*. But there, they too had their little faults. They were often flints to the poor; merciless to the humble:

No Voice to scold;
No face to frown;
No hand to smite
The helpless down:
Ay, Stranger, here
An Infant lies,

With worms for
Welcome Paradise.

That's there, I grant ye; to commemorate what they called a charity brat; that's there, and true to the times.'

His voice had completely changed in his old-fashioned recitation of the little verses; he declaimed them with oval mouth, without gesture, and yet with a kind of half-timid enthusiasm.

'And then,' he continued, 'there's little Ann Hards:

They took me in Death dim,
And signed me with God's Cross;
Now am I Cherub praising Him
Who but an infant was.

And not many yards distant is a spinster lady who used to live in that old Tudor house whose chimney-stack you can see there above the trees. She was a little "childish," poor creature, but a gentle loving soul—Alice Hew:

Sleep sound, Mistress Hew!
Birds sing over you;
The sweet flowers flourish
Your own hands did nourish;
And many's the child
By their beauty beguiled.
They prattle and play
Till night call them away;
In shadow and dew:
Sleep sound, Mistress Hew!'

I leant forward in the warm ambrosial air. It seemed I could almost read the distant stones myself in its honey-laden clearness. 'Please, please go on—if it does not tire you. How I wish I could venture in! But there goes the station master—the "Station Master"! isn't *that* mediæval enough? And I *suppose* there'll be no time!'

'Right once more: the bull's-eye once more,' he retorted in triumph. 'No time; and less eternity. Think of it: I must have been fifty years on this world before even those eyes of

yours were opened. And was the spirit within you in a worse place then than this, think ye? And for the fifty years that you, perhaps, have yet to endure, shall I be in a worse, think ye?' A queer zestful look had spread over his features; and once again he lifted his voice, decanting the next lines, as if in praise of some old vintage port:

> All men are mortal, and I know't;
> As soon as man's up he's down;
> Here lies the ashes of Thomas Groat,
> Gone for to seek his Crown.

'I knew Groat's nephews. "Old Tom" he used to be called: and by some wags, "Unsweetened." In three years they drank down the money that he had taken fifty to amass. He died of a stroke the night before my father was born—with a lighted candle and a key in his hand. Going to bed, ma'am.

'Then there's old Sammie Gurdon's. Another character—twenty stones to the ounce;

redder than his own Christmas baron of beef; with a good lady to match. But the inn's pulled down now, and a chocolate-coloured jail has been erected over its ruins they call an Hotel. And his son's dead too:

> Maybe, my friend, thou'rt main athirst,
> Hungry and tired, maybe:
> Then turn thy face by yon vane, due west;
> Trudge country miles but three;
> I'll warrant my son, of the *Golden Swan,*
> Will warmly welcome thee.

Golden Swan! You should see it to-day, ma'am. *Ugly Duckling* would be nearer the mark! And now, if you'll take advantage of this elegant bench a moment,' he proffered a trembling and gallant hand, 'you may just espy the sisters. See, now,' he had climbed up beside me, 'there's their cypresses, and, in the shade beneath, you should catch sight of the urns. Terra-cotta, ma'am; three. Do you see 'em? Three.'

I gazed and I gazed. And at last nodded violently.

'Good!' he cried. 'And thus it runs.' He traced with his umbrella in the air, over the inscription, as it were:

Three sisters rest beneath
  This cypress shade,
Sprightly Rebecca, Anne,
  And Adelaide.
Gentle their hearts to all
  On earth, save Man;
In him, they said, all Grief,
  All Wo began.
Spinsters they lived, and spinsters
  Here are laid;
Sprightly Rebecca, Anne,
  And Adelaide.

'And their nieces and grandnieces have gone on saying it—with worse manners—until one's ashamed to look one's own cat in the face. But that's neither here nor there. To judge from

their portraits, mind ye, they were a rather masculine trio. And Nature prefers happy mediums. I'm not condemning them, dear young lady. God forbid; I'm no Puritan. But——'

'That reminds me,' I interposed hastily, 'of an epitaph in my own little old churchyard —in Gloucestershire: it's on a wife:

Here lies my wife, 7
Susannah Prout;
She was a shrew,
I don't misdoubt:
Yet all I have
I'd give, could she
But for one hour
Come back to me.'

'A gem! a gem! my dear young lady,' cried my old gentleman—as if he had himself remained a bachelor solely by accident; 'and that reminds *me* of one my dear Mother never tired of repeating:

Ye say: We sleep.
But nay, We wake.
Life was that strange and chequered dream
For the waking's sake.

And *that* reminds me of yet another which I chanced on—if memory does not deceive me—in one of the old city churches—of London: ah, twenty years gone or more:

Here lieth Nat Vole,
Asleep now, poor Soul!
'Twas one of his whims
To be telling his dreams,
Of the Lands therein seen
And the Journeys he'd been!
La, if now he could speak,
He'd not listeners seek!'

'And who wrote *that,* I wonder?'

'Ah,' he echoed slyly, '"who killed Cock Robin?" Dickie Doggerel, maybe—his mark! But what I was going to tell you concerns yet another spinster; also of this parish. Names

are no matter. She was a wild, dark-eyed, solitary creature, and in the wisdom of the Lord had a tyrant for a father. Even in the nursery —generally a quiet enough little mite—when once she had made up her mind, there was no gainsaying her. And she had a peculiar habit —a rooted instinct—my dear young lady, when she was crossed, of flinging herself flat on her face on the floor. Quite silent, mind ye—like one of those corpse-mimicking insects. Nothing would move her, while she could claw tight to anything at hand.

'However trivial the cause—perhaps a mere riband in her hair—that was the result. In a word, as we used to say when we were boys, she shammed dead. Of course, as the years went by, these fits of stubborn obstinacy were less frequent. All went pretty well for a time, until her very wedding-day—bells singing, guests swarming, almond-blossom sprouting, bridesmaids blooming—all of a zest. And then and there, fresh from her

maid, she flung herself flat on her face once more. Refused to speak, refused to stir. Her father stormed; her aunts cajoled; her old nurse turned on the watering-cart.' (My old gentleman grimly chuckled.) 'No mortal use at all. The lass was adamant.

'And fippety-foppety Mr. Bridegroom, whom I never cared much for sight or scent of, must needs smile and smile and return home to think it over. From that moment her father too fell mum. They shared the same house, the same rooms, the same table—but mute as fish. And either for want of liberty or want of company, the poor young thing fell into what they used to call a decline. And then she died. And the old despot buried her, laying her north to south, and face downward in her coffin.'

'Face downward!' I exclaimed.

'Face downward,' he echoed, 'as by rights our sprightly three over yonder should have been buried, being all old maids. And she,

poor soul, scarce in her twenties. . . . And for text: "*Thou* art thy mother's daughter." '

'*Autres temps, autres mœurs,*' I ventured, but feeling uncommonly like a piping wren meanwhile.

'Ah, ah, ah!' laughed my old gentleman; 'I have noticed it! . . . And now, perhaps you may be able to detect with those young eyes of yours a little old tombstone set under that cypress yonder. . . . Too far? Too "*dark,*" eh? . . . Well, that's a sailor's; found well-nigh entirely fish-eaten in the Cove yonder—under Cheppelstoke Cliff. And pretty much to the point it is. Let—me—see. Ay, thus it goes.' He argued it out with his gloved forefinger for me:

> If thou, Stranger, be John Virgin, then the
> Corse withinunder is nameless, for the Sea
> so disfigured thy Face, none could tell
> whether thou were John Virgin or no:
> Ay, and whatever name I bore
> I thank the Lord I be

Six foot in English earth, and not
Six fathom in the sea.

'Good English sense, that, with a bay-leaf of Greek and a pinch of Irish to keep it sweet. He was the ne'er-do-well son of an old miller, so they say, who ground for nothing for the poor. So that's once upon a time too! But there, ma'am, I'm fatiguing you. . . .'

'Please, please go on,' I pleaded hurriedly. 'What's that curious rounded stone rather apart from the others, with the ivy, a little up the hill?' We had resumed our seats on the hard varnished bench, as happy as lovebirds on a perch. My old gentleman evidently enjoyed being questioned.

'What, Fanny's? That's Fanny Meadows's died of a consumption, poor lass, 1762—May, 1762.

"One, two, three"—
O, it was a ring
Where all did play

The hours away,
Did laugh and sing
Still, "One, two, three,"
Ay, even me
They made go round
To our voices' sound:
'Twas life's bright game
And Death was "he."
We laughed and ran,
Oh, breathlessly!
And I, why, I
But a maid was then,
Pretty and winsome,
And scarce nineteen;
But 'twas "One—two—three;
And—out goes she!" '

His aged, faded eyes, blue as a raven's, narrowed at me an instant; and the queerest glimpse, almost one of anxiety, came into his face. He raised his head, as if to smile the reminder away, and busily continued. 'Now come back a little, along this side. A few paces beyond, under the hornbeam, lies Ned

Gunn, a notorious poacher in these parts—though the ingrate's forgotten his dog:

Where be Sam Potter now?
Dead as King Solomon.
Where Harry Airte I knew?
Gone, my friend, gone.
Where Dick, the pugilist?
Dead calm—due East and West.
Toby and Rob and Jack?
Dust every one.
Sure, they'll no more come back?
No: nor Ned Gunn.

Not that there would be many to welcome him if he did. And next him lies a curmudgeonly old fellow of the name of Simpson, who lived in that old yellow stone house you may have seen beyond the meadows. He was a kind of caretaker. Many's the time he chased me when I was a lad for trespassing there:

"Is that John Simpson?"
"Ay, it be."

"What was thy age, John?"
"Eighty-three."
"Was't happy in life, John?"
"Life is vain."
"What then of death, friend?"
"Ask again."

And that, my dear young lady, is wisdom at any age; though Simpson himself, mind ye, couldn't mumble at last a word you could understand, having no teeth in his head. And yet another stranger is rotting away under an oblong of oak a pace or two beyond Simpson. I don't mean he was strange to the locality' (he gazed full at me over his spectacles); 'not at all—I knew him well; though by habit he was a silent close-mouthed man, with a queer dark eye. I mean he was strange to this World. And *he* wrote his own epitaph:

Dig not my grave o'er deep
Lest in my sleep
I strive with sudden fear
Toward the sweet air.

Alas! Lest my shut eyes
Should open clear
To the depth and the narrowness—
Pity my fear!

Friends, I have such wild fear
Of depth, weight, space;
God give ye cover me
In easy place!

Not that they favoured him much on that account! It's a hard soil. And next *him,* with snapdragons shutting their mocking mouths at you out of every crumbling cranny, is Tom Head. A renowned bell-ringer in his day:

I rang yon bells a score of years:
Never a corse went by;
But they all said—bid old Tom Head
Knoll the bell dolesomely:
Ay, and I had a skill with the rope
As made it seem to sigh.

'Now I must tell you there was an old gentleman lived here before my time—and his name is of no consequence—who had a fancy for commemorating those who would otherwise have left scanty remembrances enough behind them. Some I have already made mention of. Here's another. Nearly every village, you must know, my dear young lady, has its half-wit, but not every village graveyard. And where this one's bush is, they call Magpie Corner. Let me see now. . . .' (My old gentleman made two or three false starts here; but at last it ran free.)

Here lieth a poor Natural:
The Lord who understandeth all
Hath opened now his witless eyes
On the Green Fields of Paradise.

Sunshine or rain, he grinning sat:
But none could say at who or what.
And all misshapen as he were,
What wonder folk would stand and stare?

He'd whistle shrill to the passing birds,
Having small stock of human words;
And all his company belike
Was one small hungry mongrel Tyke.

Not his the wits ev'n joyed to be
When Death approached to set him free—
Bearing th' equality of all,
Wherein to attire a Natural.

'But there goes the signal! And we've scarce time for the midget.'

A strange old green porter shuffled out from his den into the sunshine. A distant screech, like the crow of a ghostly pheasant, shrilled faintly out of the distance. I had suddenly grown a little tired; and hated the thought of the journey before me. But my arbitrary old gentleman cared for none of these things.

He gave me his 'midget' leisurely, academically, tenderly:

Just a span and half a span
From head to heel was this little man.

Scarcely a capful of small bones
Raised up erect this Midget once.
Yet not a knuckle was askew;
Inches for feet God made him true;
And something handsome put between
His coal-black hair and beardless chin.
But now, forsooth, with mole and mouse,
He keeps his own small darkened house.

He paused an instant, and laid lightly two gloved, mysterious fingers on my arm.

'She's coming,' he almost whispered. 'There's her white wool against the blue.' He nodded towards the centipede-like creature creeping over the greenness towards us. 'We are all mythologists—and Goddesses! We can't avoid it and—and' (he leaned closer and clucked the words under the very brim of my hat)—'it's called Progress. Veil then those dark eyes just once of a morning, ma'am; and have a passing thought for Sam Gilpin. We shall meet again; the unlikeliest like with like. And this must be *quite* the last. Just beside

a little stone sill of water in that corner' (once more the iron-ferruled stump was pointed towards the tombs) 'where the birds come to drink, is the figure of a boy, standing there, in cold stone, listening. How many times, I wonder, have I scurried like a rabbit at twilight past his shrine? And yet, no bones there; only a passing reminder:

> Finger on lip I ever stand;
> Ay, stranger, quiet be;
> This air is dim with whispering shades
> Stooping to speak to thee.

What do we think of that, eh?'

He sprang up, his round glasses blazing in the sun. 'Well, well! smiles be *our* finis, ma'am. And God bless you for your grace and courtesy. . . . Drat the clumsy fellow!'

But it was I who 'passed on'—into the security of a 'compartment' filled with two fat commercial-looking gentlemen asleep; a young lady in goggles smoking a cigarette; a haggard

mother with a baby and a little boy in velveteen trouserettes and a pale blue bow who was sucking a stick of chocolate, and a schoolboy swinging his shoes, learning geography, and munching apples. A happy human family enough.

I joined them as amiably as the heat allowed. And my last gliding glimpse of the tranquil little country station—burning sweet-william, rioting rose—descried my old gentleman still on his bench; still in his tall hat; still leaning on his gingham; a kind of King Canute by the sad sea waves of Progress, tapping out his expostulations and anathemas, though now to his own soul alone.

'BENIGHTED'

'BENIGHTED'

As for us two, lest doubt of us yee have,
Hence far away we will blindfolded lie . . .

We surveyed one another a little ruefully in the starry air—and it is years ago now, that quiet evening—then turned once more to the darker fields around us.

'Yes,' she said; 'there isn't the least doubt in the world. We are lost. Irretrievably. Before that owl screeched, there seemed to be just a remote chance for us. . . . But now: not a house, not a living being in sight.'

'No one,' I said.

'Not even Mrs. Grundy,' she said, and sighed. 'Poor dear—she has sipped her posset, tied on her nightcap, and gone to bed.'

Baa! cried a faintly lachrymose voice out of

the stony pasture beyond the rough flint wall.

'It's all very well to say "Baa,"' she replied, accepting the challenge. 'But it makes us all, you see, look a little sheepish.' There was silence: we trudged on.

Nights of summer-time remain warm with day, and are seldom more than veiled with a crystalline shadowiness which is not darkness, but only the withdrawal of light. Even at this midnight there was a radiance as of pale blue glass in the north, though east to west stretched the powdery myriads of the Milky Way. Honeysuckle, bracken, a hint of hay, and the faint, aromatic scent of summer lanes saturated the air. The very darkness was intoxicating.

'I could walk on like this for ever,' I managed to blurt out at last.

'Those "for evers"!' mocked a quiet voice.

The lane ran deeper and gloomier here. Beneath heavy boughs thick with leaves gigantic trees were breathing all around us. The vast,

taciturn silence of night haunted the ear; yet little furtive stirring sounds kept the eyes wide open. Once more we paused, standing stock still together.

'Let's just go on up—a little way,' I pleaded. 'There *might* be a house. You look so sleepy—and so lovely—my dear. A sort of hawk-like look—with that small head in this dim blur; even though your eyes *are* full of dreams.'

She laughed and turned away. 'Not sleepy, only a little drugged. And oh, if only I could be lovely *enough!*'

We did go up, and presently, out from under the elms. And we came to many houses, low and squat and dark and still—roofing the soundest of all sleepers. We gazed slowly from stone to stone, from tiny belfry to distant Vega.

'Well, there they are,' I said. 'And they appear to have been there for some little time. What a silence!'

'Why, so!' she answered. 'And such is life, I suppose—just the breaking of it.'

'And you forgive me?'

'I try.'

'I could have sworn we were on the right road.'

'"She trusted in him, and there was none to deliver her!" But of course,' she said, 'the road is right. There is no other way than the way once taken. And especially this. Besides, my dear, I don't mind a bit; I don't indeed. It's still, and harmless, and peaceful, and solitary. We are all alone in the world. Let's sit down in there and talk.'

So we entered the old graveyard by its tottering gateway and seated ourselves on a low flat tombstone, ample enough in area for the Sessions of all the Sons of Israel.

The wakefulness of the long weariness had overtaken us. The dark air was translucently clear, sprinkling its dew on all these stones and their overshadowing boughs. We rav-

enously devoured the fragments left over after our day's march. And we talked and talked, our voices sounding small and hollow even to ourselves, in this heedful solitude. But at last we too fell silent; for it began to be cold, and that hour of the night was coursing softly by us when a kind of unhumanity seems to settle on the mind, and words lose the meanings they have by day; just as the things of day may be transformed by night—ranging themselves under the moon like phenomena of another world.

'I wonder,' I said at last, 'when we—or just you, or I, come to a place like this: I wonder, shall we forget—be forgotten—do you think? Nearly all these must be.'

'In time,' she answered.

'Yes, in time; perhaps. Not exactly "forget," though—but remember; with all the hopelessness, the helpless burning and longing gone. Isn't that it?'

'I wonder,' she said gravely. 'Life's an

abominably individual thing. We just *live* on our friends.'

'And what would you say about me—if you had to? On my stone, I mean? *Before* forgetting me?'

But her face gave no sign that she had heard so fatuous a question. I somehow refrained the sigh that offered itself.

'Let's see what *they* did,' I said.

So, no moon yet shining, I took out my match-box and counted out its contents into her left hand.

'Twenty-one,' I said dubiously, having come to an end of our telling.

'Riches!' she replied. 'You see, even if we have to use two for a tombstone, that would be ten altogether, and a little stone over. And surely there should be, say, *three* epitaphs among them. I mean, apart from mere texts. It's a little odd, you know,' she added, peering across the huddled graves.

'What's odd?'

'Why, that there are likely to be so few worth reading—with such lots to say.'

'Not so very odd,' I said. 'Your Mrs. Grundy hates the sight of them. They frighten her.'

'Well, I don't somehow think,' she answered, peering through the shadowiness at me, 'I don't somehow think anybody else ever was here but you and me. It's between real and dream—like Mrs. Grundy herself.'

I held out my hand; but she smiled and would give me no proof. So we began our scrutiny, first stooping together over the great stone that had seated us to supper. And all that it surrendered for our reward was the one straddling word—'M O R S.'

The dark, flat surface was quite unbroken else. The flame (screened between the shell of my hands) scarcely illumined its margins. The match languished and fell from my fingers.

'"Mors." And what does Mors mean?' inquired that oddly indolent voice in the quiet.

'Was it his name, or his initials, or is it a charm?'

'It means—well, sleep,' I said. 'Or nightmare, or dawn, or nothing, or—it might mean everything.' I confess, though, that to my ear it had the sound at that moment of an enormous breaker, bursting on the shore of some unspeakably remote island; and we two marooned.

'Well, that's one,' she said. '"Mors": how dull a word to have so many meanings! You men are rather heavy-handed, you know. You think thinking helps things on. I like that Mors. He was a gentleman.'

I stared blankly into the darkness: and my next match flared in vain on mouldering illegibility. The third lasted us out, however, stooping side by side, and reading together:

> Stranger, where I at peace do lie
> Make less ado to press and pry!
> Am I a Scoff to be who did
> Life like a stallion once bestride?

Is all my history but what—
A fool hath—soon as read forgot?
Put back my weeds, and silent be.
Leave me to my own company!

We hastened to do as we were bid, confronted by phantom eyes so dark and piercing, and groped our way over a few markless grassy mounds to the toppling stone of 'Susannah Fry, who after a life grievous and disjointed, fell asleep in a swoon':

Here sleep I,
Susannah Fry,
No one near me,
No one nigh:
Alone, alone
Under my stone,
Dreaming on,
Still dreaming on:
Grass for my valance
And coverlid,
Dreaming on
As I always did.

'Weak in the head?'
Maybe. Who knows?
Susannah Fry
Under the rose.

Under the rose Susannah lay indeed—a great canopy of leaves and sweetness looming up palely in the night darkness. 'That's six,' I said, turning away from a tomb inscribed with that prosaic rendering of 'Gather ye rosebuds'—'Take care lest ye also be called early': and the victim a Jeremiah of seventy-two! The tiny flame spluttered and hissed in the dewy grass.

But our seventh rewarded us:

Here lies my husbands; One, Two, Three:
Dumb as men ever could wish to be.
As for my Fourth, well, praise be God
He bides for a little above the sod.
But his wits being weak and his eyeballs dim,
Heav'n speed at last I'll wear weeds for him.
Thomas, John, Henry, were these three's names
And to make things tidy, I adds his—James.

'If it would not in the least prejudice matters, might I, do you think, be Thomas?' I said. 'The unsuspecting?'

She laughed out of the darkness. 'The pioneer!' she said. 'Hope on.'

Our next two matches burned over a stone which only the twisted roots of a rusty yew tree had for a little while saved from extinction. The characters were nearly extinct on its blackened lichenous surface:

> Here restes y^e^ boddie of one
> Chrystopher Orcherdson.
> Lyf he lived merrilie;
> Nowe he doth deathlie lie:
> All y^e^ joye from his brighte face
> Quencht in this bitter place.
> With gratefull voice then saye,
> Not oures, but Goddes waye!

With grateful voice I counted out yet another six of the little store left into a hand cold and dim. And we took it in turn to choose

from among the grassy mounds and stones. Two matches were incontinently sacrificed: one to a little wind from over the countryside, smelling of Paradise; and one to a bramble that all but sent me crashing on to the small headstone of the 'Shepherd,' whose mound was a positive mat of fast-shut bindweed flowers. Oddly enough, their almond-like smell became more perceptible in the vague light we shed on them.

A Shepherd, Ned Vaughan,
'Neath this Tombstone do bide,
His Crook in his hand,
And his Dog him beside.
Bleak and cold fell the Snow
On Marchmallysdon Steep,
And folded both sheepdog
And Shepherd in Sleep.

Our next two matches gleamed on a tomb raised a little from the ground, with a damp-greened eyeless head on each panel that must once have been cherubim:

Here rest in Peace Eliza Drew and James Hanneway
whom Death haplessly snatched from Felicity.
Eliza and James in this sepulchre tarry
Till God with His trumpet shall call them to marry.
Then Angels for maids to the Bride shall be given,
And loud their responses shall echo in Heaven.
And e'en though it be that on Paradise Plains
A wife is no wife, spinster spinster remains,
These twain they did tarry so long to be wed
They might now prefer to stay happy instead.
Howe'er it befall them, Death's shadows once past,
They'll not laugh less sweetly who learn to laugh last.

And we spent two more on a little old worn stone couched all askew, and nearly hidden in moss:

Poor Sam Lover
Now turf do cover;
His Wildness over.

It was obviously a sacred duty to clear at least of sow-thistles and nettles the grave of one once loved so kindly. 'There! Sam

Lover,' exclaimed a rather breathless voice at last, ' "nettles shall not sting this year." '

And at that moment the first greenish pallor of the fast-waning and newly-risen moon peered out on us from between the yews.

Distant and companionable, cock answered cock across the drowsy acres. But even when it had ascended a little into its brightness the moon shone but wanly, casting the greyest of faint shadows from the fretted spire over the tombs of a Frenchman, Jules Raoul Dubois, and the Virgin on his left hand.

> Here sleeps a Frenchman: Would I could
> Grave in his language on this wood
> His many virtues, grace and wit!
> But then who'd read what I had writ?
> Nay, when the tongues of Babel cease,
> One word were all-sufficient—Peace!

Thick English grasses waved softly over him beyond the faint moonlight, and covered as deeply the grave of one left nameless:

Blessed Mary, pity me,
Who was a Virgin too, like Thee;
But had, please God, no little son
To shower a lifetime's sorrows on.

Just a message out of nothingness, for the words summoned no picture, scarcely even the shadow of a human being, into the imagination. Not so those over which the last of our twenty-one battled feebly against the moon:

J. T.
Here's Jane Taylor,
Sweet Jane Taylor,
Dark,
Wild,
Dear Jane Taylor.

Silence, dense as the milky mist that wreathed the neighbouring water-meadows, now enwrapt us. Cold and cheerless, we sat down once more to await the coming of the dawn. And it was the sun's first clear beams, putting to shame all remembrance of night, that, slanting in

palest gold, lit up for us a little odd stone at our feet, almost hidden in brambles:

> Be very quiet now:
> A child's asleep
> In this small cradle,
> In this shadow deep!

Words have strange capricious effects. *Now,* it was as if I could actually recall in memory itself the infant face in its white frilled cap—icily still, stonelike.

And then I raised my eyes and looked into the face of the living one beside me. Hers were fixed as if absently on the broken inscription, the curved lids fitting them as closely as its calyx the rose. The face was cold and listless; her hands idle in her lap. It was as though the beauty of her face were lying (like a mask) dead and forgotten, the self within was so far away.

A thrush broke into song, as if from another world. Conscious at last of my silence per-

haps, she slowly lifted her head into the gilding sunshine. And as if with a shrug of her slender shoulders, 'Now for the rest of our lives,' she said.

WINTER

WINTER

'All the other gifts appertinent to man, as the malice of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry. . . .'

ANY event in this world—any human being for that matter—that seems to wear even the faintest cast or warp of strangeness, is apt to leave a disproportionately sharp impression on one's senses. So at least it appears to me. The experience lives on secretly in the memory, and you can never tell what trivial reminder may not at some pregnant moment bring it back—bring it back as fresh and living and green as ever. That, at any rate, is my experience.

Life's mere ordinary day-by-day—its thoughts, talk, doings—wither and die away out of the mind like leaves from a tree. Year

after year a similar crop recurs: and that goes too. It is mere débris; it perishes. But these other anomalies survive, even through the cold of age—forsaken nests, everlasting clumps of mistletoe.

Not that they either are necessarily of any use. For all we know they may be no less alien and parasitic than those flat and spotted fungi that rise in a night on time-soiled birch trees. But such is their power to haunt us. Why else, indeed, should the recollection of that few moments' confrontation with one who, I suppose, must have been some sort of a 'fellow-creature' remain so sharp and vivid?

There was nothing much unusual in the circumstances. I must have so met, faced, passed by thousands of human beings: many of them in almost as unfrequented places. Without effort I can recall not one. But this one! At the first unexpected premonitory gloom of Winter; at sight of any desolate stretch of snow; at sound at dusk of the pebble-like tat-

tling of a robin; at call, too, of a certain kind of dream I have—any such reminder instantly catches me up, transports me back. The old peculiar disquietude possesses me. I am once more an unhappy refugee. It is a distasteful experience.

But such things are difficult to describe—to share. Date, year are, at any rate, of no account; if only for the reason that what impresses us most in life is independent of time. One can in memory indeed live over again events in one's life every twenty years or more gone by, with same fever of shame, anxiety, unrest. Mere time is nothing.

Nor is now the actual motive of my journey of any consequence. At the moment I was in no particular trouble. No burden lay on my mind—nothing, I mean, heavier than that of being the kind of self one is—a fret common enough in these late days. And though my immediate surroundings were unfamiliar, they were not unusual or unwelcome, since, like

others who would not profess to be morbid, I can never pass unvisited either a church of any age or its yard.

Even if I have but a few minutes to spare I cannot resist hastening in to ponder awhile on its old glass and brasses, its stones, shrines, and monuments. Sir Tompkins This, Lord Mount Everest That—one reads with a curious amusement the ingenuous bygones of their blood and state. I have sometimes laughed out. And queer the echo sounds in a barrel roof. And perhaps an old skimpy verger looks at you, round a pillar. Like a bat.

In sober fact this human pomposity of ours shows a little more amiably against any protracted background of time—even a mere two centuries of it. There is an almost saturnine vanity in the sepulchral—scutcheons, pedigrees, polished alabaster cherubim and what not. You see it there—like a scarcely legible scribbling on the wall. Well, on this occasion it was not any such sacred interior I was ex-

ploring, but a mere half-acre of gravestones huddling under their tower, in the bare glare of a winter's day.

It was an afternoon in January. For hours I had been trudging against a bitter winter wind awhirl with snow. Fatigue had set in —that leaden fatigue when the body seems to have shrunken; while yet the bones keep up a kind of galvanic action like the limbs of a machine. Thought itself—that capricious deposit —had ceased for the time being. I was like the half-dried mummy of a man, pressing on with bent head along an all but obliterated track.

Then, as if at a signal, I looked up; to find that the snow had ceased to fall: that only a few last, and as if forgotten, flakes were still floating earthwards to their rest in the pallid light of the declining sun.

With this breaking of the clouds a profounder silence had fallen upon the dome-shaped summit of the hill on which I stood. And at its point of vantage I came to a stand-

still awhile, surveying beneath me under the blueing vacancy of the sky, amidst the white-sheeted fields, a squat church tower, its gargoyles stooping open-mouthed—scarcely less open-mouthed than the frosted bells within. The low mounded wall that encircled the place was but just perceptible, humped with its snow. Its yews stood like gigantic umbrellas clotted with swansdown; its cypresses like torches, fringed, crested, and tufted with ash.

No sound broke the frozen hush as I entered the lych-gate; not a figure of man or beast moved across that far-stretching savanna of new-fallen snow. You could have detected the passage of a fly. Dazzling light and gem-clear coloured shadow played in hollow and ripple. I was treading a virgin wilderness, but one long since settled and densely colonized.

In surroundings like these—in any vast vacant quiet—the senses play uncommonly queer tricks with their possessor. The very air, cold and ethereal and soon to be darkened, seemed

to be astir with sounds and shapes on the edge of complete revelation. Such are our fancies. A curious insecure felicity took possession of me. Yet on the face of it the welcome of a winter churchyard is cold enough; and the fare scanty!

The graves were old: many of them recorded only with what nefarious pertinacity time labours and the rain gnaws. Others befrosted growths had now patterned over, and their tale was done. But for the rest—some had texts: 'I am a Worm, and no Man'; 'In Rama was there a Voice heard: Lamentation and Weeping'; 'He knoweth the Way that I take.' And a few still bore their bits of doggerel:

> Stranger, a light I pray!
> Not that I pine for day:
> Only one beam of light—
> To show me Night!

That struck me as a naïve appeal to a visitor

not as yet in search of a roof 'for when the slow dark hours begin,' and almost blinded for the time being by the dazzle of the sunlight striking down on these abodes around him!

I smiled to myself and went on. Dusk, as a matter of fact, is *my* mind's natural illumination. How many of us, I wonder, 'think' in anything worthy of being called a noonday of consciousness? Not many: it's all in a mirk, without arrangements or prescience. And as for dreaming—well, here were sleepers enough. I loafed on—cold and vacant.

A few paces further I came to a stand again, before a large oval stone, encircled with a blunt loop of marble myrtle leaves embellishing the words:

> 'He shall give His angels charge over thee,
> To keep thee in all thy ways.'

This stone was clasped by two grotesque marble hands, as if he who held it knelt even now behind it in hiding. Facing north, its lower sur-

face was thickly swathed with snow. I scraped it off with my hands:

I was afraid,
Death stilled my fears:
In sorrow I went,
Death dried my tears:
Solitary too,
Death came. And I
Shall no more want
For company.

So, so: the cold alone was nipping raw, and I confess its neighbour's philosophy pleased me better: i.e., it's better to be anything animate than a dead lion; even though that lion be a Corporal Pym:

This quiet mound beneath
Lies Corporal Pym.
He had no fear of death;
Nor Death of him.

Or even if the anything animate be nothing better than a Logge:

Here lies Thomas Logge— a Rascally Dogge;
A poor useless creature — by choice as by nature;
Who never served God — for kindness or Rod;
Who, for pleasure or
penny, — never did any
Work in his life — but to marry a Wife,
And live aye in strife:
And all this he says — at the end of his days
Lest some fine canting pen
Should be at him again.

Canting pens had had small opportunity in this hillside acre: and the gentry of the surrounding parts, like those of most parts, had preferred to lie inside under cover—where no doubt Mr. Jacob Todd had prepared for many of them a far faster and less starry lodging:

Here be the ashes of Jacob Todd,
Sexton now in the land of Nod.
Digging he lived, and digging died,
Pick, mattock, spade, and nought beside.
Here oft at evening he would sit
Tired with his toil, and proud of it;
Watching the pretty Robins flit.

Now slumbers he as deep as they
He bedded for y^e^ Judgement Day.

Mr. Todd's successor, it seemed, had entrusted him with a little protégée, who for a few years—not quite nine—had been known as Alice Cass:

My mother bore me:
My father rejoiced in me:
The good priest blest me:
All people loved me:
But Death coveted me:
And free'd this body
Of its youthful soul.

For youthful company she had another Alice. A much smaller parcel of bones this—though in sheer date upwards of eighty years her senior:

Here lyeth our infant, Alice Rodd;
She were so small,
Scarce aught at all,
But a mere breath of Sweetness sent from God.

Sore we did weepe; our heartes on sorrow set.
Till on our knees
God sent us ease:
And now we weepe no more than we forget.

Tudor roses had been carved around the edge of her stone—vigorously and delicately too, for a rustic mason. Every petal held its frozen store. I wandered on, restlessly enough, now that my journey was almost at an end, stooping to read at random; here an old broken wooden cross leaning crookedly over its one legible word 'Beloved'; here the great, flat, seventeenth-century vault of Abraham Devoyage, 'who was of France, and now, please God, is of Paradise'; and not far distant from him some Spanish exile, though what had brought such a wayfarer to these outlandish parts, heaven alone could tell:

Laid in this English ground
A Spaniard slumbers sound.
Well might the tender weep

To think how he doth sleep—
Strangers on either hand—
So far from his own land.
O! when the last Trump blow,
May Christ ordain that so
This friendless one arise
Under his native skies.
How bleak to wake, how dread a doom,
To cry his sins so far from home!

And then Ann Poverty's stone a pace or two beyond him:

Stranger, here lies
Ann Poverty;
Such was her name
And such was she.
May Jesu pity
Poverty.

A meagre memorial, and a rather shrill appeal somehow in that vacancy. Indeed I must confess that this snowy waste, these magpie stones, the zebra-like effect of the thin snow-stripings on the dark tower beneath a leaden

winter sky suggested an influence curiously pagan in effect. Church sentiments were far more alien in this scene of nature than beneath a roof. And after all, Nature—if She she be —teaches us mortals, I suppose, little but endurance, patience, despair, or fear. That she can be entrancing proves nought.

On the contrary, the rarer kinds of natural loveliness—enormous forests of flowering chestnuts, their league-long broken chasms a-roar with cataracts and foaming with wild flowers; precipitous green steeps—quartz, samphire, cormorant—plunging a thousand fathoms into dark gulfs of emerald ocean—such memories hint far rather at the inhuman divinities. This place, too, was scarcely one that happy souls would choose to haunt. And yet, here was I . . . in a Christian burial ground.

But then, of course, one's condition of spirit and body must be taken into account. I was exhausted, and my mind like a vacant house

with the door open—so vacant by now that I found I had read over and over the first two or three lines of Asrafel (or was it Israfel?) Holt's blackened inscription without understanding a single word; and then, suddenly, two dark eyes in a long cadaverous face pierced out at me as if from the very fabric of his stone:

Here is buried a Miser:
Had be been wiser,
He would not have gone bare
Where Heaven's garmented are.
He'd have spent him a penny
To buy a Wax Taper;
And of Water a sprinkle
To quiet a poor Sleeper,
He'd have cried on his soul,
'O my Soul, moth & rust!—
What treasure shall profit thee
When thou art dust?'
'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!'
God grant, in those Scales,

His Mercy avail us
When all Earth's else fails!

'. . . Departed this life May the First 1700': two long centuries dead, seraphic Israfel! Was time nothing to him too?

'Now withered is the Garland on the . . .' the fragment of old rhyme chased its tail awhile in the back of my mind, and then was gone.

And I must be going. Winter twilight is brief. Frost was already glittering along the crisping surface of the snow. A crescent moon showed silvery in the sun's last red. I made her a distant obeisance. But the rather dismal sound of the money I rattled in my pocket served only to scare the day's last robin off. *She*—she paid me no heed.

Here was the same old unanswerable question confronting the traveller. 'I have no Tongue,' cried one from his corner, 'and Ye no Ears.' And this, even though nearby lay Isaac Meek, who in certain features seemed

easily to have made up for these deficiencies:

Hook-nosed was I; loose-lipped. Greed fixed its gaze
In my young eyes ere they knew brass from gold.
Doomed to the blazing market-place my days,
A sweating chafferer of the bought and sold.
Frowned on and spat at, flattered and decried,
One only thing man asked of me—my price.
I lived, detested; and forsaken, died,
Scorned by the Virtuous and the jest of Vice.
And now behold, you Christians, my true worth!
Step close: I have inherited the Earth.

I turned to go—wearied a little even of the unwearying. Epitaphs in any case are only 'marginal' reading. There is rarely anything unusual or original in such sentiments as theirs. Up to that moment (apart from the increasing cold) this episode—this experience—had been merely that of a visitor ordinarily curious, vulgarly intrusive, perhaps, and one accustomed to potter about among the antiquated and forgotten.

No: what followed came without premoni-

tion or warning. I had been stooping, for the last time, my body now dwarfed by the proximity of the dark stone tower. I had been reading all there was to be read about yet another forgotten stranger; and so rapidly had the now north-east wind curdled the air that I had been compelled to scrape off the rime from the lettering with numb fingertips. I had stooped (I say) to read:

> O passer-by, beware!
> Is the day fair?—
> Yet unto evening shall the day spin on
> And soon thy sun be gone;
> Then darkness come,
> And this, a narrow home.
> Not that I bid thee fear:
> Only, when thou at last lie here,
> Bethink thee, there shall surely be
> Thy Self for company.

And with its last word a peculiar heat coursed through my body. Consciousness seemed sud-

denly to concentrate itself (like the tentacles of an anemone closing over a morsel of strange food), and I realized that I was no longer alone. But—and of this I am certain—there was no symptom of positive *fear* in the experience. Intense awareness, a peculiar physical ominous absorption, possibly foreboding; but not actual fear.

I say this because what impressed me most in the figure that I now saw standing amid that sheet of whiteness—three or four grave-mounds distant on these sparse northern skirts of the churchyard—what struck me instantly was the conviction that to him I myself was truly such an object. Not exactly of fear; but of unconcealed horror. It is not, perhaps, a pleasing thing to have a record. My appearance there—dark clothes, dark hair, wearied eyes, ageing face, a skin maybe somewhat cadaverous at that moment with fasting and the cold—all this (just what my body and self

looked like, I mean) cannot have been much more repellent than that of scores and scores of men of my class and means and kind.

I was merely, that is, like one of the 'Elder Ladies or Children' who were bidden (by Mr. Nash's Rules of the Pump Room in Bath in 1709) be contented 'with a second bench . . . as being past, or not come to, Perfection.'

None the less, there was no doubt of it. The fixed open gaze answering mine suggested that of a child confronted with a fascinating but repulsive Reptile. Yet so strangely and arrestingly beautiful was that face, beautiful with the strangeness I mean of the dreamlike, with its almost colourless eyes and honey-coloured skin, that unless the experience of it had been thus sharply impressed, no human being could have noticed the emotion depicted upon its features.

There was not the faintest faltering in the steady eyes—fixed, too, as if this crystal graveyard air were a dense medium for a sight un-

used to it. And so intent on them was I myself that, though I noticed the slight trembling of the hand that held what (on reflection) appeared to resemble the forked twig which 'diviners' of water use in their mysteries, I can give no account of this stranger's dress except that it was richly yet dimly coloured.

As I say, my own dark shape was now standing under the frowning stonework of the tower. With an effort one of its gargoyles could have spilt heaven's dews upon my head, had not those dews been frozen. And the voice that fell on my ear (as if from within rather than from without) echoed cold and solemnly against its parti-coloured stone:

'Which is the way?'

Realizing more sharply with every tardy moment that this being, in human likeness, was not of my kind, nor of my reality; standing there in the cold and snow, winter nightfall now beginning to lour above the sterile landscape; I could merely shake a shivering head.

'Which is yours?' sang the tranquil and high, yet gentle voice.

'There!' I cried, pointing out with my finger the pent-roofed gate on to the human road. The astonishment and dread in the strange face seemed to deepen as I looked.

'But I would gladly . . .' I began, turning an instant towards the gloomy snow clouds that were again gathering in the north—'I would gladly . . .' But the sentence remained unfinished, for when I once more brought my eyes back to this confronter, he was gone.

I agree I was very tired; and never have I seen a more sepulchral twilight than that which now overspread this desolate descent of hill. Yet strange though it may appear, I knew then and know now this confrontation was no illusion of the senses. There are hours in life, I suppose, when we are weaker than we know; when a kind of stagnancy spreads over the mind and heart that is merely a masking of what is gathering beneath the surface. Whether or

not, as I stood looking back for an instant before pushing on through the worn lych-gate, an emotion of fear, remorse, misery—I know not—swept over me. My eyes seemed to lose for that moment their power to see aright. The whole scene was distorted, awry.